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SUBJECT: RUSSIA: DELTA AND SHEREMETYEVO AIRPORT OFFICIALS
DISCUSS FLIGHT DELAYS

¶1. (SBU) Delta and Sheremetyevo Airport (SVO) officials met January 29 to discuss delays in take off - and as a result, of its overall "block time" - of its Moscow-Atlanta flight. (Block time refers to push back from departure gate to arrival at gate at entry point.) Delta Flight 47's "block time" has continually exceeded 12 hours - the maximum allowed by FAA for U.S. carriers - since construction of Sheremetyevo (SVO) Terminal 3 started, causing long taxi lines for take off. As a temporary solution, Delta pilots will radio the control tower for advice on taxi time before they push back from the gate. In three weeks (pending Atlanta approval), Delta 47's departure time will change from 12:55PM to 12:25PM, which will put the aircraft first in line to depart, after the runway is reopened following its daily construction closure.

¶2. (SBU) The tone of the meeting was positive and both sides were clearly committed to keep Delta 47 running. Delta's Atlanta-Moscow flight is running at 90-95% capacity and is more popular than its link to New York. The plane carries approximately 200 passengers six days per week.

BACKGROUND

¶3. (SBU) Under FAA directives, airlines can exceed its block time no more than 30% of its flights in any given 90-day period. Since construction of Sheremetyevo Terminal 3 began, Delta has faced increased taxi time on the SVO runway and exceeded the twelve-hour block time almost daily. According to Delta, it has taken steps to reduce its block time: paying Atlanta's Hartsfield Airport for priority service so it can proceed directly to the gate upon arrival; reprogramming its flight mapping computer to go faster to reduce flight time (though costing \$800-\$1000 more in daily fuel), and working with SVO to reduce the taxi time before take off in Moscow.

¶4. (SBU) Sheremetyevo Terminal 3 construction is expected to continue until the beginning of 2008. The runway is closed for 80 minutes each morning for unavoidable construction. SVO Deputy Director General for Operations Vladimir Buryak and Director of Air Traffic Control Alexander Vedernikov voiced their support to help Delta find a long-term solution. They offered Delta a daily 12:25PM take off time, which would make it the first to depart after the construction break and, therefore, eliminate its taxi time. Delta's Atlanta HQ's representative, who attended this meeting, said this long-term solution would work pending senior HQ approval, but Delta would need three weeks to change its tickets, notify passengers, and adjust connections. SVO agreed to the three-week delay.

